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ABSTRACT

This booklet, written for parents and other citizens concerned about education, discusses some of the reasons why the arts are--and should be--a part of every student's basic education. Seven reasons are listed and discussed: arts as communication; arts and creativity; arts and understanding human civilization; arts and learning other subjects; arts and discipline; arts and preparation for adult life; and arts and artistic judgment. Elements of an outstanding arts program are described. A list of questions is included for evaluating school arts programs. Suggestions are presented for getting involved in school arts programs. (CB)

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# Performing Together:

# The Arts and Education

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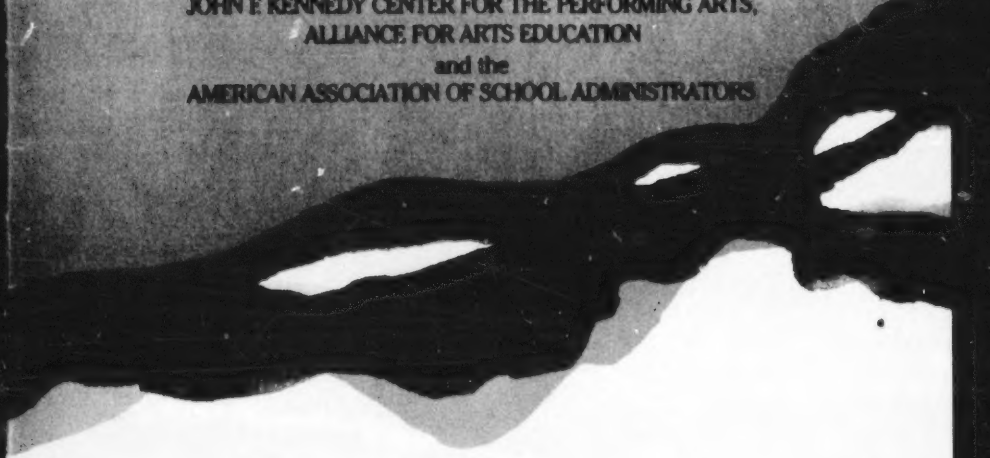

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*I am certain that after the dust of centuries has passed over our cities, we too will be remembered not for victories or defeats in battle or politics, but for our contribution to the human spirit.*

*—John F. Kennedy*

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The future of our nation depends on our ability to create—and to be creative. During the coming decades, our most important natural resources will be *human* resources. If our nation is to continue to meet the challenges of the future, today's schools need to develop creative leaders.

And that's one of the most important reasons that the arts are a vital part of our children's education. The arts—which include dance, music, creative writing, drama, painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, video, and other visual arts forms—stimulate creativity in solving problems. They challenge students' perceptions and teach them to look at the world around them in new ways. These skills are essential as our society faces the future. The arts also help students improve the quality of their lives by helping them understand, appreciate, and create an environment that is functional as well as beautiful.

This booklet is designed for you as a parent or other citizen concerned about learning. It discusses some of the reasons why the arts are—and should be—a part of *every* student's basic education. It outlines some of the characteristics of an excellent school arts program. And it suggests some ways that you can get involved to support the arts in your community's schools.

# Why Do the Arts Belong in our Schools?

## 1 The arts are a basic means of communication.

The arts are a basic form of human communication—like the words that make up a language or the symbols that make up mathematics. The arts provide an important

way to teach students how people interact with each other. For some students, the arts provide an outlet for thoughts, emotions or aspirations they cannot express in any other way.

"If I could *tell* you what I mean," the famous modern dancer Isadora Duncan once said, "there would be no point in dancing."

## 2 The arts help students develop their creativity and their creative talents.

The great scientist Albert Einstein once reflected that "the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge." Studying the arts gives all students that gift. When they study drama, they can become someone else, if only for a few minutes. When they create a painting, they can see the world with fresh eyes. Research has shown that students who study the arts are also more likely to display originality and creativity in other subjects.

*"Americans have always made music. From the pioneers to the astronauts, music has been a part of our country's character. When we share songs with our children, we are also giving them part of America."* —*Burl Ives*

## 3 Studying the arts helps students learn all other subjects as well.

Because the arts are such a basic means of communication, and because they provide such insight into the ways other people think, studying the arts can enable students to learn other subjects as well. The Council for Basic Education includes the arts in its list of essential subjects that all students should study in school.

## 4 Studying the arts is one of the best ways to understand human civilization.

The arts represent an essential part of a civilization. Because the arts directly reflect their creators, they provide direct communication with the past—and sometimes a glimpse of the future. A serious study of the arts is a part of any student's education. Anyone who hopes to understand ancient Greece, for example, should read some of the plays of Sophocles.

## 5 Studying the arts helps students develop discipline.

When students begin to study any art form seriously, they learn immediately that they must work every day if they want to perfect their skill. When students see that professional artists must still undergo the rigorous discipline of daily practice before performing, they are learning a valuable lesson in self-discipline that will help them be successful in their chosen art form—and in their daily lives.

Student artists also see first-hand that artists are always striving for—but never quite reaching—perfection. On Pablo Casals' 95th birthday, a reporter asked him why, although he was certainly the world's greatest cellist, he still began each day's practice session with the same simple piece by Bach. Casals' reply was instructive: "Because I think I am getting better."

## 6 Studying the arts in school helps prepare students for their adult lives.

Some of the students who study the arts in school may discover their lifetime career interest. Perhaps only a small percentage of aspiring actors, dancers, writers, musicians, or visual artists will ultimately earn a living as a professional artist. But there are thousands of other jobs in the arts—technical fields such as lighting or costume design, management, promotion, and a host of others. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that more than 1.3 million Americans earn their living as performing or visual artists, and that millions more are employed in other arts-related fields.

Besides teaching some students about how to earn a living, the arts can teach all students important things

about living. For example, mastering an art form can contribute to personal confidence. Whatever their vocation, millions of adults enjoy the arts during their leisure time. Some futurists predict that by the year 2000, the typical American will work only 20 to 30 hours per week. The arts provide citizens of the future with one enjoyable way to make the best possible use of this increased leisure time.

## 7 Studying the arts helps students develop their artistic judgment.

From the moment we get dressed in the morning until we turn out the light at night, each of us makes a host of decisions that are affected by our own artistic judgment. What clothes shall we wear? What radio station will we listen to? Will we buy that magazine that catches our eye on the newsstand? Which restaurant should we choose for a special dinner?

And whether we realize it or not, as we make those decisions, we are acting on our own sense of design, color, texture, shape, pattern, order, movement, line, and scale. The arts have always been an integral part of everyday life.

# What Makes an Arts Program Outstanding?

Just as there is no "best" painting and no "best" piece of music, there is no "best" approach to teaching the arts. Across the country, school arts programs are as diverse as the communities in which they are found.

Most outstanding school arts programs, however, share some common characteristics. They include:

## Students *study* the arts.

The arts belong in our schools because they are serious subjects, not "frills." Everyone—administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other citizens—must treat them that way. In the best arts programs, students learn the basic skills of their art form just as they learn the basic skills in other subjects: for example, they learn how to read music just as they learn how to read words. Students should also have the opportunity to study the

history of their art form.

One student, who was recently selected as a Presidential Scholar in the Arts for her talent in writing, talked about the experience of meeting a teacher who insisted that she do her very best. "He never gave praise lightly. But, interestingly, that didn't make me want to strive to please him. It made me strive to please myself."

## Students study *all* the arts.

Many schools have traditionally included both music and the visual arts as a part of the curriculum. In many schools, the music curriculum includes chorus, band, and orchestra. Visual arts programs include instruction in crafts such as pottery and weaving as well as drawing, painting, photography, film or video, and sculpture.

Dance and drama are important subjects for a school's curriculum, as well. By studying one or more of the arts, students can acquire skills in concentration, interpersonal relationships, organization, problem solving, effective listening, physical development, artistic judgment, and leadership.

## The arts are included in special education programs.

The arts have a very special place in the education of students with physical or mental disabilities, many of whom excel in the arts. The arts can frequently enable these students to demonstrate abilities and skills that are not discovered in a regular classroom. By participating in the arts, many disabled students have discovered talents, abilities, and new ways to learn. The confidence they gain through the arts can help disabled students achieve in academic areas as well.

## Study and discussion of the arts is included in other classes.

Study and discussion of the arts can be incorporated into a number of other classes. History students can *see* the effects of the Spanish Civil War when they look at Picasso's painting "Guernica."

Some schools, in fact, have made the arts a central part of the curriculum for all students. In these elementary and secondary schools, students study the arts as separate subjects, but also have a chance to have arts-related activities incorporated into other classes.

In hundreds of other schools across the country, teachers are finding that by incorporating arts activities into their regular lessons, they give more students a chance to achieve. That increases student learning, and makes students feel even more successful.

In many communities the arts are an important part of adult and community education programs.

The study of the arts is not confined to the classroom.

Anyone who has ever watched a group of elementary school children sit motionless and transfixed by a performance of a good children's theater company knows what a powerful and direct experience the arts can be for students. That's why school districts, private nonprofit organizations, parent-teacher associations, individual principals, and school administrators across the country are so active in providing live performances for children and young adults.

Frequently, artists visit the schools to perform for a class or the entire student body. In some cases, the artists are available before and after the performance to work with students and teachers. In other cases, artists may spend an extended period of time in residence at the school. Sometimes, students are taken to a performance or a museum exhibition outside the school.

Years later, students remember these special performances. In many cases, a school performance triggers a lifelong love of the arts and encourages students to discover their own talents. Both can provide young people with years of personal enjoyment.

# ? How Does My School Arts Program Perform?

As a citizen, you may want to make sure that your school's arts program is as strong as it can be. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- What arts subjects are children studying in school?
- Who teaches these subjects? Does the district employ special arts teachers?
- For students in secondary schools, are there scheduling problems that make it difficult to include the arts in a student's schedule? For example, is chorus scheduled at the same time as the only section of trigonometry?
- Do teachers ever include an arts-related discussion or activity in other subjects?
- Do students ever have an opportunity to visit a live performance or art exhibition outside the school?
- Do students with disabilities have the arts included as an important part of their education?
- If a student displays particular talent in one or more of the arts, does the school have a program that will allow that student to devote more time to study and practice?
- When students study careers, are some arts-related careers included?
- Do professional artists ever visit my community's schools?
- Are specially talented parents or community members invited to share their skills and talents with students?
- Are school performances by drama, music, or dance groups well publicized in my community? Are all citizens—not just parents—invited to attend?
- Is the work of student artists ever displayed in the community? For example, do local businesses ever sponsor a display of student art work? Do students ever perform in the community?
- Do students have an opportunity to learn how to be a good, informed audience member?

# Here's How YOU Can Get Involved

If you believe that the arts should be a vital part of your community's schools, here are some ways you can get involved.

## Examine the strengths in your community and school.

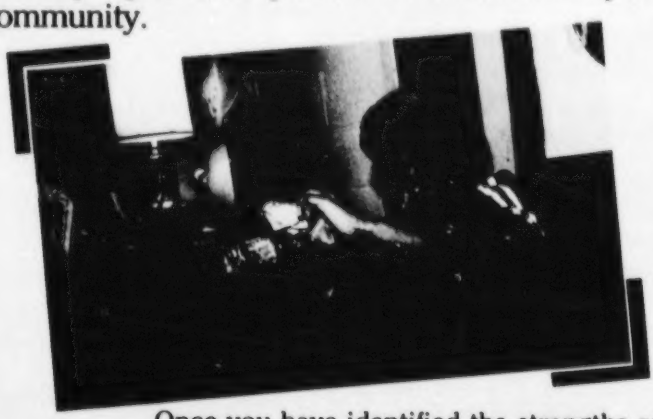
The most important first step you can take is to evaluate the strengths that already exist. Does your school have excellent music, art, drama, or dance teachers? Are there outstanding local cultural resources such as museums, performers and performing groups, ethnic groups that preserve traditional cultures, or an active local arts council? Do your community's students have rich ethnic traditions that include the arts?

## Share your concern about the arts with others.

Talk with school administrators and teachers about your interest in and concern for the arts. Talk with other citizens, too. Get together and share your lists of arts resources in your community and school. You may find that there are resources you've overlooked.

During this process, you may discover specific areas that you feel can be strengthened. Work together with parents, teachers, school administrators, and other citizens to support a strong program in the arts.

Working with school administrators and teachers, develop a plan to improve arts education in your community.



Once you have identified the strengths and weaknesses of your school's arts education program, get active to help meet the goals you have established. You may ask your school district to help teachers find ways to incorporate the arts into their classrooms. You may wish to work with the school board to provide funds to hire additional arts teachers. You may decide to apply to your local or state arts council for a grant to bring performers to your child's school. Professional associations of arts educators can be an excellent resource. These include the American Theatre Association, the Music Educators National Conference, the National Art Education Association, and the National Dance Association as well as their state affiliates. The National Committee, Arts with the Handicapped is an excellent source of information on arts and disabled students. The Kennedy Center's Alliance for Arts Education, which includes parents, teachers, school administrators, artists, and concerned citizens, can also provide information and guidelines on how to take action.

Just as works of art are as diverse as the artists who create them, excellent school arts programs are as diverse as the teachers, parents, administrators, and students who make them happen. You and the citizens of your community can perform together to create the very best program for the children in your area. And that, too, can be a real work of art.

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